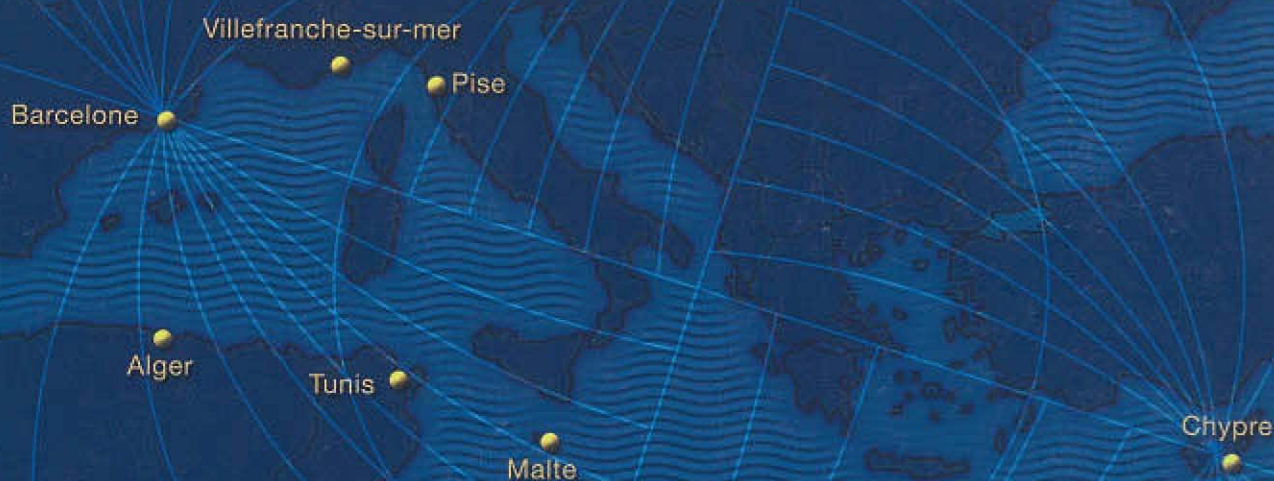


La Navigation du Savoir الإبحار في المعرفة

Réseau des arsenaux historiques de la Méditerranée



Actes du colloque

Premières Journées internationales du patrimoine maritime méditerranéen
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Understanding the Present through Navigating the Past

In the middle of the seventeenth century, a Maltese traveller, Gio Francesco Bonamico, undertook the Grand Tour. His tour was unusual in that it went against prevailing conceptions of how one was supposed to go about the tour. In history, the Grand Tour is associated with a journey from the North of Europe, usually starting in London or Paris, and ending in Rome or Naples. Bonamico's voyage proceeded in the opposite direction. He departed from Malta travelling towards Marseilles and continued northwards, visiting many European cities. From the North of France he proceeded to Flanders, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and on the southward leg he also visited Spain, Italy, Sicily and some of the Greek islands.

Gio Francesco Bonamico was the son of a migrant family. His father, Francesco, was born in Nantes and had participated in the French wars of religion before he emigrated to Malta in 1623, where he established himself as a surgeon of some note. It was doubtless under his father's guidance that Gio Francesco first developed a taste for travel and love for medicine. Indeed, his father was anxious to provide his Gio Francesco with an excellent education and he financed his son's studies in medicine at Montpellier University. From those early experiences, Bonamico must have built up his views on travel. Indeed, in the introduction to his journal of memories and impressions of his Grand Tour he wrote that the biggest revolution in the history of mankind was the development of the concept of travelling.

This may seem capricious: surely the urge to travel is an atavistic human emotion, and scarcely as dramatic as the agrarian, industrial, or electronic revolutions, or indeed, say, Gutenberg's invention of the printing press or the discovery of America. In his own way, however, Bonamico was far-sighted. Travelling was for Bonamico a permanent 'exhibition', allowing the traveller to encounter and experience different cultures and assist in the formation of the 'universal man'. It could even be said, not too fancifully, that Bonamico had anticipated the pertinence of organizing international exhibitions where characteristics of different cultures are allowed to come together: for if, unlike Bonamico, we are unable to travel, then the encounter with different cultures which Bonamico craved can at least, in displaced form, be brought to us.

The exhibitions held in Villefranche-sur-mer in April 2003, and the other exhibitions set for Malta in October 2004 and for Tunis in 2005 in part fulfil Bonamico's aspirations. Indeed, one of the principal aims of the *Navigation du Savoir* Project is to bring people from the

Mediterranean regions together. This is sought firstly through virtual travelling. The construction of a website (www.navigationdusavoir.net) has been aimed at introducing people from all over the globe and in particular from the Mediterranean to the varied and stimulating cultural heritage of the region.

Moreover, this project also seeks to encourage the movement of people. Further, a governing idea behind the setting up of three major exhibitions in Villefranche-sur-Mer, Malta and Tunis is transporting visitors across time. Visitors to the Villefranche-sur-Mer exhibition were invited to visit a number of installations recalling different aspects of the Mediterranean maritime past. They were treated to exhibits ranging from archaeological and medieval artifacts (like Arabic astrolabes, roman amphorae, and ancient underwater equipment) to models and photos of historic arsenals (like the one of Pisa and Venice, and including also images of different boats and vessels existing in Malta between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century).

Yet, the « Navigation du Savoir » Project is not restricted to what is mounted in exhibition halls or to surfing over the web. Another aspect of the project is the encouragement given to a number of students to travel in order to enhance their maritime knowledge. In fact, *La Navigation du Savoir* aims at the setting up of schools and courses dedicated to reviving our knowledge of maritime history, and to ensuring brighter prospects for the study of that history. A number of schools have already been organised, focusing on themes like underwater archaeology, maritime carpentry, and the cultural management of related sites. All these activities are aimed at creating fora for discussion, permitting individuals from different social backgrounds and countries to get together without boundaries of religion, nationality or social status. Participants meet in an open and equitable setting in order to discuss and exchange ideas with each other.

One hopes that this platform which « La Navigation du Savoir » is creating can reach towards the ideal of fraternity so much loved, cherished and propagated during the French Revolution of 1789 but which, for various reasons, has remained elusive.

Realistically, however, one hopes that this whole project would bring about, through the various exhibitions and foregrounding initiatives, those aspects of cultural diversity which Gio Francesco Bonamico was so intrigued by.

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